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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 3rd MEETING

Chairman: Mrs. ESPINOSA (Mexico)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to document A/C.3/51/1, containing a letter dated 20 September 1996 from the President of the General Assembly on the allocation of items to the Third Committee. The subsequent agreements reached by the Committee on its work programme at the meeting on 20 September were reflected in document A/C.3/51/L.1/Rev.1. The updated information on the status of preparation of documentation was contained in document A/C.3/51/L.1/Add.1/Rev.1.

2. Document A/C.3/51/5 contained a letter dated 26 September 1996 from the Chairman of the Fifth Committee submitting relevant programmes of the proposed medium-term plan to the Third Committee for review. In order to carry out the review, she had asked the Secretariat to schedule an additional meeting at 10 a.m. on 23 October. She took it that the members of the Committee agreed to hold that additional meeting.

3. It was so decided.

4. The CHAIRMAN said that, with regard to the programmes enumerated in the letter from the Chairman of the Fifth Committee, she had pointed out to him that programme 20 (Humanitarian assistance) and programme 22 (Palestinian refugees) were not within the purview of the Third Committee at the current session.

AGENDA ITEM 158: QUESTION OF THE ELABORATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AGAINST ORGANIZED TRANSNATIONAL CRIME (A/C.3/51/7)

5. Mr. WYZNER (Poland), introducing item 158, said that his country had proposed the elaboration of a convention against transnational organized crime, which was a worldwide phenomenon that corrupted States and brought tragedy and suffering to many innocent people. The world was witnessing the spread of international crime in its most dangerous manifestations: terrorist acts, illicit drug trafficking, money laundering, trafficking in persons, including women and children, and illicit trafficking in weapons. Owing to the rapid development of international trade and economic relations, freedom of movement and the flow of capital, there was an alarming growth in the number of criminals whose activities had a transboundary, and often global, character.

6. No State, not even the most powerful, could combat organized crime alone. Close international cooperation, particularly coordination among law-enforcement institutions and criminal-justice systems, was therefore urgently needed. Neither the measures taken to combat transnational organized crime nor existing international instruments dealing with specific aspects of organized-crime prevention were sufficient to come to grips with the problem. Accordingly, the international community should agree on a framework convention that would establish effective forms of cooperation among States in providing legal assistance and setting up reliable reporting and monitoring systems with a view to reducing and eradicating organized crime. In Poland's view, the proposed new framework convention should be based on existing international instruments

regulating illicit narcotic drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, the protection of nuclear material and the import and export of cultural property as well as bilateral and regional agreements on crime prevention.

7. His delegation had noted with great interest the proposals recently made in the Sixth Committee by the United States of America and the Russian Federation aimed at combating and eliminating international terrorism, including terrorist bombings and acts of nuclear terrorism. Those proposals and the Polish proposal under consideration would complement each other. His country sought to promote greater awareness of organized crime in order to encourage Governments and the international community to provide the necessary means to combat that phenomenon. The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice should be requested to elaborate, on a priority basis, a convention against transnational organized crime, taking into account the views of Member States as well as the draft text submitted by Poland in document A/C.3/51/7. Lastly, his delegation hoped that a draft resolution on that agenda item could be adopted by consensus.

STATEMENT BY THE UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLICY COORDINATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

8. Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) said that a great deal had been achieved in terms of policy development over the past five or six years. The rethinking of development involved integrating economic, social and environmental concerns, which were very much the responsibility of the Third Committee. It was important to go beyond North-South rhetoric, and to identify a basis for work on development cooperation within the United Nations system based on shared objectives, values and interests. The Committee's work on social development, the advancement of women and human rights clearly involved efforts to identify such shared values and objectives.

9. Another element in the rethinking of development was the need to identify a role for public policy in an environment where Governments were moving more and more towards a belief in market-based development. That had been among the major objectives of recent global conferences such as the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. Such issues as the condition of the world's women and children, the eradication of poverty, and human rights could not be left to market forces, and the Committee had played an important part in ensuring that such issues were on the agenda at those conferences.

10. Although much work remained to be done in the area of policy development, the key issue was currently the need to put greater emphasis on implementation. In recent years there had been a type of policy development which had been credible in the eyes not only of those involved in negotiations but also of those responsible for implementation at the national level, including non-government actors, such as businesses, trade unions, cooperatives, and above all non-governmental organizations. It was important to retain that credibility by showing that policy development was capable of placing appropriate emphasis on implementation. It required an integrated approach to monitoring and review at the national, regional and global levels, as well as an improved architecture in the functioning of the intergovernmental process within the United Nations,

so that the different elements of the monitoring and review process could reinforce one another. It also required that the analytical, normative and operational work of the United Nations system should be increasingly guided by the outcome of the major policy-development processes and by the underlying objectives of integration and mainstreaming.

11. One of the key objectives of that exercise was to create links between the normative and operational aspects. A number of task forces had been set up, the objective of which was to move from policy towards the creation of operational guidelines for implementation at the country level. It was also necessary to see how the intergovernmental process could contribute to ensuring improved links between policy development and implementation. A good example of that was the programme on disability, which sought to combine the analytical, normative and operational sides. Rather than stopping at the policy stage and declaring that implementation was someone else's responsibility, a system had been set up whereby a Special Rapporteur would report back to the Commission for Social Development, and through that to the Economic and Social Council, on the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

12. The credibility of the policy-development processes would be eroded if it could not be shown that effective implementation could be ensured. The two major themes of interest to the Committee in that context were integration and mainstreaming. Integration was a key issue in the area of social development; social progress must be treated, not as a secondary issue, but as something to be written into development policy from the start. Mainstreaming was of greater importance in the case of gender equality. The issue of the advancement of women must be looked at not simply in terms of specific actions relating only to women, but with a view to ensuring gender sensitivity in the very formulation of development policy.

13. The role of the Third Committee in such areas was vital, and he looked forward to working with, and receiving guidance from, the Committee as part of the Secretariat's continuing efforts to move forward from the policy development phase to the implementation phase.

AGENDA ITEM 100: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (A/51/3 (Parts I and II), A/51/87, A/51/208-S/1996/543, A/51/210, A/51/267; A/C.3/51/4)

14. Mr. KRASSOWSKI (Division for Social Policy and Development, Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development), introducing the report on the status and role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends (A/51/267), said that the report summarized information on how people's needs for basic social services were being met through a variety of cooperative arrangements. The report reviewed national experience in promoting the contribution of cooperatives to social development in forms compatible with the principles and objectives of the major international conferences held since 1990, and focused on the need for Governments to keep under review the legislative and administrative framework governing the functioning of cooperative-type arrangements in various sectors. Attention was also gi to ways of encouraging cooperative-to-cooperative assistance.

15. Mrs. de BARISH (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the developing countries, which had young populations, were concerned with the question of ageing because the world was in the midst of a major demographic revolution: the ageing of its population. At present, more than half of the elderly in the world lived in developing countries and by 2025 nearly three quarters of them would be in those countries. Unlike the developed countries, the developing countries had neither the infrastructure to deal with ageing nor the resources to create one.

16. The infrastructure for ageing in developed countries was too expensive to be duplicated in most developing nations. Accordingly, there was a need to generate and encourage responses to ageing that could be synchronized with the development policies and strategies of developing countries. Ageing and development were complementary, not contradictory, since the elderly could participate in and contribute to the development process. The Group of 77 and China were looking forward to participating in the Committee's work on that question and hoped to make progress in the preparations for the 1999 International Year of Older Persons.

17. Mr. OTUYELU (Nigeria) stressed the need for future-oriented social development to meet the challenge posed by population growth and diminishing resources. Privatization in many countries was putting health care beyond the reach of poor people. Owing to indebtedness and poor terms of trade, many developing countries were not able to allocate resources to social development. Greater international cooperation was necessary in order to make resources available to improve social development and invest in infrastructures. It was necessary to strike a balance between privatization and public responsibility for social development. Accordingly, his delegation appealed for more international cooperation among United Nations organizations in the field of social development in order to carry out the commitments undertaken at the World Summit for Social Development.

18. Mr. HADJIYSKY (Bulgaria) welcomed the selection of the Commission for Social Development as the principal body for coordinating and monitoring the follow-up to the 1995 World Summit for Social Development. A comprehensive analysis of ways to rationalize the Commission's work should be carried out.

19. In May 1996 the Bulgarian Government had adopted a national programme for social development as a follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. The national programme set forth strategies aimed at promoting sustainable development, social peace and the gradual eradication of poverty. It sought to establish a socio-economic environment conducive to raising living standards; to reduce poverty, create jobs and curb unemployment; to promote social integration by meeting the needs of vulnerable groups; and to participate in international cooperation in social development. Bulgaria cooperated actively with UNDP in the social field and intended to launch in the near future a second joint project aimed at eliminating poverty and social marginalization.

20. Mr. KALLEHAUGE ((Denmark) said that he wished to highlight the question of disabled persons. The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul in June 1996, had been an important step for disabled persons in their ongoing struggle to achieve equal

opportunities. In the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, it was clearly stated that the disabled persons had a right to shelter which was physically accessible. The Danish Government had already set up committees to formulate a national accessibility policy. Much, however, remained to be done. The implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and of the Long-term Strategy to Implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons to the Year 2000 and Beyond remained the main objective. The current focus - as recommended by the Special Rapporteur on the implementation of the Standard Rules - should be on legislation, coordination of work, organizations of persons with disabilities, accessibility, education and employment.

21. Legislation, in particular, should be given high priority, at both the national and international levels. When the rights of disabled persons were no longer recommendations but statutory instruments, the equalization of opportunities would gain much more momentum. The international community had an important role to play in that regard by recognizing some of the rights enumerated in the Standard Rules as fundamental human rights. Recognition of those rights would be enhanced by their inclusion in the agenda of the Commission on Human Rights.

22. In resolution 50/144, the General Assembly had noted the initiative taken by non-governmental organizations to develop a disability index based on the Standard Rules. Further to that initiative, questionnaires had been distributed to 650 organizations of disabled persons and replies had been received from more than 80 countries.

23. Fifteen years earlier, the World Health Organization (WHO) had introduced a new community-based rehabilitation strategy. He believed it would be opportune to carry out an international evaluation of the experience gained in implementing it. The evaluation would best be conducted by the World Bank, in cooperation with other relevant specialized agencies and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as representatives from organizations of disabled persons. He urged the Committee to lend its support to that proposal.

24. Mr. POULSEN (Denmark) said that he would focus on the question of youth participation in decision-making. Young people were less burdened than their elders by history and tradition and as such were able to contribute valuable new ideas. They were therefore key agents in social development and change and must be seen as natural and equal partners in society.

25. With the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, the United Nations had taken an important step. The United Nations system must now move towards realizing the goals of the Programme. Projects drawing upon the special expertise of youth organizations should be developed. Peer learning, where young people educated one another, was one method of enabling young people to improve their own situation. Often, young people were best placed to address their peers and establish relationships based on trust. His delegation was particularly concerned that young women and girls, sometimes as young as 13, were having children, many before they were ready to cope with that responsibility, and often as a result of inadequate sex

education. The key to overcoming that problem was to provide them with unprejudiced information.

26. The World Youth Forum provided an important opportunity for non-governmental youth organizations to meet with representatives of intergovernmental organizations. Funds must be made available to ensure youth participation from the world's least developed countries. He was pleased to announce, in that connection, that the Danish Government was to provide a grant to enable 10 youth delegates from the least developed countries to participate in the forthcoming session of the World Youth Forum to be held in Vienna in November 1996. It was in the interest of the international community to give young people the possibility of participating in society and making decisions so that they could develop the skills they would require to lead the world into the future.

27. Mr. EDWARDS (Marshall Islands) recalled that the Republic of the Marshall Islands was currently the Chair of the South Pacific Forum. The delegations of the Forum had been actively involved in the recent World Summit for Social Development, and had reaffirmed their willingness to work towards an improved international structure for the betterment of their peoples. They had placed on record their commitment to human rights and to the fundamental premise that all their development efforts would be centred upon the Pacific Islands peoples.

28. The Governments of the region had closely examined the Programme of Action of the World Summit, and had attempted to distil out a priority agenda for national implementation. At recent meetings of the Forum, the whole gamut of issues including economic and environmental aspects of development had been addressed with a clear understanding of their social dimensions.

29. In the Marshall Islands, the public sector was being asked to do more with less, and was currently undergoing a far-reaching structural adjustment, which had led to increased unemployment. His Government had therefore sought loans for a transition programme involving retraining and private-sector incentive schemes. Fortunately the economy of the Marshall Islands was not one of those being drained by such wasteful expenditure as military budgets; the country had spent the greatest part of its resources on the social well-being of its people.

30. A number of community-based organizations were working hard to provide assistance to the less privileged. They were, however, badly under-funded. International support was sorely needed, but very little had so far been forthcoming. Governments and community-based organizations in the countries of the South Pacific Forum had made commendable progress in social development, and deserved support. He called upon those who pledged support for people-centred human and social development to look favourably on the countries of the region.

31. Mr. HUSSAIN (Sudan) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Social development was a matter given top priority by his Government. The family was particularly important, since society as a whole was a reflection of the family, and if the family was strong, so was society. However, it was clear that social development was only possible given continuing economic development, which in turn was only possible under peaceful circumstances. The international

community's concern with social development had been demonstrated by the six international conferences held in the past decade, and its wish to relieve poverty in developing countries had been stated in the 20/20 initiative, as described in the Programme of Action of the World Summit. However, that wish required political will and practical input. Neutrality and transparency were also important factors in implementation.

32. Technological and other developments had made the world a small village, and limited each State's freedom to decide its own economic and social policies. States should therefore cooperate to produce appropriate social and economic development programmes, guarantee political stability and security and avoid conflict. Strengthening local organizations would help to keep the problems of intolerance under control and assist in social development.

33. Since the end of the cold war, armed conflicts had become regional and inter-communal rather than global, and savings in military expenditure had not been as great as had been hoped. Complete and universal disarmament would be a prime factor in creating the right atmosphere for social development.

34. Concern for all sectors of society was a first step towards building a healthy society. The Sudan paid particular attention to young people, as the foundation stone of development. In the past three years, the number of institutions of further education had been greatly increased, as had the number of technical and vocational training institutes. The Government had also increased employment opportunities for young people, and was working to attract investment to provide the necessary resources. Because of the importance of education to social development, the Government was making every effort to eradicate illiteracy throughout the country.

35. The nature of the family in modern society was undergoing great change. Some societies saw the individual as having the primary role in society, thereby diminishing the role of the family as the primary unit. The individual had become divorced from his family, and that had engendered many current social ills. The Sudan considered that the individual must be set firmly against his natural background of the family. The family, as a child's first teacher, represented the most secure foundation for the future of every society. It had an important role to play in producing a sound and healthy person and in beginning to instil the principles and practice of human rights. Because of its belief in the importance of the family, the Government had made arrangements to facilitate marriage.

36. Social development could only be achieved through the eradication of poverty, the realization of peace and security, the cultivation by societies of decent moral values and the elimination of social injustice and discrimination on the grounds of religion, race or culture.

37. Ms. SKEI GRANDE (Norway), speaking as a youth representative, said that the planet which her generation would inherit was facing enormous global challenges, such as the global warming, which would have major environmental consequences. The sharing of the world's resources, including water and food, was also a major problem. Young people worldwide faced the same challenges and should be granted increased access to decision-making. Their participation was both desirable and

necessary; their visions, solidarity and strong motivation were badly needed. Young people, through their own organizations, should be allowed to shape their future at all levels. The most important mass movements for peace, human rights, the environment and democracy had all been strongly supported by young people. Student movements had brought about significant democratic changes in several countries.

38. The United Nations should be in the front line in that respect. The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (General Assembly resolution 50/81, annex) was a step in the right direction, but must be followed up. The young must be given increased influence at the United Nations, and recommendations made by youth organizations such as the Youth Forum of the United Nations System should receive more attention.

39. In the collective effort to counter the serious threats to the existence of the human race, every little step would count. She appealed to all countries to give young people more access to decision-making, both regionally and nationally, and to let them participate in shaping their own future. The States Members of the United Nations should work towards increased numbers of youth representatives at their meetings, and enable the Youth Forum to become a regular event with secure financing.

40. Ms. MESDOUA (Algeria) said that changes in the world economy and increasing modernization and globalization had side effects which led to economic disparities and potential threats to international peace and security. The worsening poverty, unemployment and social disintegration, particularly in the countries of the southern hemisphere, called for sustained efforts by the international community to promote a new concept of international development cooperation. The World Summit for Social Development provided a useful frame of reference for the policies of individual Governments. The objectives agreed at the Summit showed that the international community was determined to intensify its struggle against poverty, exclusion and social disintegration, to create productive employment and to increase international solidarity. Such solidarity was essential if the widening gap between developed and developing countries was to be narrowed. A concerted approach was required.

41. Algeria had succeeded, in a few decades, in providing employment, free health care and education, and a broad social-welfare system for its population. Despite considerable economic difficulties, her Government was determined to preserve those achievements and to bring about economic, social and political renewal based on a market economy, social justice, the rejection of any form of marginalization or exclusion, and the establishment of a durable democratic system. The support of the international community was required to that end. Her Government hoped that national efforts to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of individuals and peoples would be strengthened by effective international action. International financial institutions must adapt their strategies and review their programmes in the interest of secure global development; otherwise, individual country's efforts to strengthen democracy might not succeed.

42. The time had come for the United Nations to give concrete expression to its original mandate in the economic and social fields. The Organization could be a real force for peace only if it were also a force for development. Only if

intergovernmental agencies were strengthened and their work harmonized could the United Nations system make a significant contribution to development. The Commission for Social Development had a vital role to play in the system-wide coordination of activities in the social field. Her delegation welcomed the strengthening of the Commission's mandate and the increase in its membership. Those measures should be accompanied by increased resources to enable it to accomplish its tasks.

43. The follow-up to the Summit required real cooperation and partnership between States, the United Nations system, international financial and monetary institutions, and non-governmental organizations. They must all work together to provide the means required for such a great undertaking. As long as there was poverty, no country could be said to have achieved true development.

44. Mr. WISSA (Egypt) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the Group of 77 and China. There was a pressing need to increase efforts in favour of social development, and to examine the reasons for the lack of equitable development throughout the world. The State had a pivotal role to play in development, but its efforts could only be successful in a favourable international environment created by such factors as trade, investment, bilateral resources and the transfer of technology.

45. The family and youth, ageing and the disabled were all interrelated issues, of direct relevance to comprehensive development in any society. The family was the basis of society, and his Government therefore continued to work to raise awareness of social and development role of the family, and the part it had to play in the implementation of programmes affecting the family, particularly in the areas of health, education and the environment.

46. Education was not merely desirable in itself, but one of the principal means of achieving development. His country's education policy was therefore built on an understanding of the need for cooperation between the local authorities and non-governmental organizations in confronting such problems as illiteracy and the provision of proper education for girls and young women.

47. Egypt welcomed the conceptual framework of a programme for the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, since that would help to highlight the difficulties experienced by older persons, and ways to alleviate them. Older persons represented an important resource upon which Governments could call if appropriate channels were found.

48. His country considered it very important to educate and integrate disabled persons into society, since their marginalization was a violation of basic human rights and of religious and humanitarian values.

49. The Egyptian Government had begun to elaborate a set of policies and programmes to implement the recommendations of the World Summit for Social Development. A broad national programme to eliminate poverty was being carried out.

50. With reference to the 20/20 initiative embodied in the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, it had been agreed that the initial

target was 0.7 per cent of gross national product, and that the ability of the Government of a developing country to devote 20 per cent of its expenditure to basic social services would depend on the level of economic development, its debt burden and other financial commitments. The 20/20 initiative should therefore include agreement on the concept of social programmes, donor assistance based on financial accounts prepared by recipient countries, and the preparation of national budgets involving specific allocation and follow-up.

51. Mr. GUBAREVICH (Belarus) said that the scale and variety of the social problems facing the world today threatened the very foundations of the normal development of human civilization. It was therefore vital to ensure that Governments and the United Nations worked together to translate the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action into reality. The recent special session of the Commission for Social Development devoted to the urgent goal of eradicating poverty had made an important contribution to that end. With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on the status and role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends (A/51/267), his delegation recognized the part which the cooperative movement had to play in implementing the commitments made at Copenhagen, particularly in the areas of employment, social integration and poverty eradication.

52. Conscious of the inseparable link between economic growth and social development, his Government had striven to avoid a sharp drop in the living standards of the population in the current period of transition and, accordingly, it had taken measures to stabilize the economy and counter inflation. Nevertheless, the economic reforms had been accompanied by a dramatic fall in output, rising prices, the reduction of real income and a decrease in the funds available to the State to deal with those problems. In addition, spending necessitated by the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster still accounted for one fifth of the country's annual budget.

53. The increase in the proportion of older persons in the population of Belarus was placing a mounting burden on those of working age, while expenditure on pensions, medical care and social assistance for the elderly had grown markedly. Taking as its reference the International Plan of Action on Ageing, Belarus had drawn up its own programme of measures to assist older persons. Central aims were the transformation of services for the elderly, the safeguarding of their rights in law and the construction of special institutions to provide health care and social services for pensioners.

54. The situation of families during the current period of economic transition was of great concern to his Government. Families with low incomes - for the most part large and single-parent families - were facing extreme hardship. In addition, there was now a need to address the problems of families that had become refugees or were affected by unemployment. His Government had set up a system of allowances for families with children. The incomes of the population were currently being indexed to inflation, and a rent-subsidy scheme had been worked out.

55. His delegation believed that it was essential to strengthen the Commission for Social Development, which played a key role in formulating and coordinating policy on social questions. That aim would best be achieved, in his view,

through intensive, rather than extensive measures. Specifically, the Commission should seek more efficient methods of organizing its work, both during and between sessions, and the resources already at its disposal should be used more effectively. He welcomed the proposals that the members of the Commission should hold informal, open consultations and that there should be regular meetings of the Bureau. He supported the widening of the Bureau's powers in the belief that such a step would enable consensus to be reached more quickly on the Commission's heavy programme of work.

56. The concept of dialogues with groups of experts, for the most part representatives of the relevant bodies of the United Nations system and of the Governments of Member States, was of great interest. His delegation urged that due regard should be given to the principle of equitable geographical distribution when the applications of such experts were considered. He supported the view that non-governmental organizations should play a greater part in the Commission's work. Finally, while his delegation welcomed the overwhelming majority of the measures proposed in order to strengthen the role of the Commission, that goal must be achieved within existing resources; he could not, therefore, support the proposals to widen the Commission's membership and hold annual sessions.

57. Among the most welcome results of the recent sessions of the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women was the recognition in their resolutions that the international community must accord special assistance to countries with economies in transition, particularly in the social sphere and in the struggle with poverty. It was regrettable, however, that that recognition had not found reflection in the relevant United Nations programmes. He urged delegations to consider the proposal by Belarus concerning the adoption of a global programme of assistance to countries with economies in transition. The efforts of Governments to realize the commitments made in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action must, in his view, be supported by the international community.

58. Mr. REYES RODRÍGUEZ (Cuba) expressed his delegation's support for the remarks made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Any social development programme must comprise policies for action in favour of young people, the elderly and persons with disabilities, all of which were groups to which his Government gave particular priority. Equity and equality of opportunities for all had been fundamental to the progress made in Cuba over the past 30 years.

59. There was no sector of economic, political and social life in Cuba in which young people did not play an essential role. Unceasing improvement in the opportunities available for young people to participate fully, in social life were the result of the policy ensured by the presence of considerable numbers of young people in Parliament and the executive branch. Cuba welcomed the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, and would support the efforts of the Commission for Social Development to evaluate its implementation.

60. Cuba would also participate to the best of its ability in the preparations for the International Year of Older Persons in 1999. The elderly in Cuba

benefited from a scheme of universal medical and hospital care, as well as social security. A major initiative was the setting up of 'grandparents' circles', which were volunteer organizations with a total of more than 150,000 members designed to involve older persons in the community through social activities. They also increased older people's awareness of their own social youthfulness by giving them a role in the education of young people and in other community activities.

61. Support for persons with disabilities included both assistance to their organizations and actions in the areas of health, education, employment, cultural activities and sport. Cuba had nearly 500 centres of special education for persons with disabilities.

62. Despite Cuba's difficult economic situation, which had worsened as a result of the tightening of the economic blockage imposed unilaterally by the United States, his Government would never abandon the humanist approach that had governed its social policy over the past three decades. Cuba would continue to be a society for all.

63. Mr. PACE (Malta) said that the role of government was fundamental to social and development issues. Many societies were experiencing major change, sometimes as a result of political measures, and such changes formed part of an international evolution. Governments should implement policies which guaranteed freedom to the citizen as a member of the community. Political initiatives could enable citizens to seek a better future for themselves and their families, and to realize their potential. Proper measures would ensure the generation of wealth, its equitable distribution and more freedom in all spheres. Social cohesion was only possible if social and cultural diversity was preserved and encouraged. The nature of social policy had changed fundamentally. His own Government had adopted the notion of a welfare society, a concept superseding the welfare State. The role of government was to integrate social services by prioritizing the needs of individuals. Governments had to work closely with voluntary organizations to enhance the participation of all those involved. Perhaps the most important accomplishment of the World Summit for Social Development had been the commitment to the goal of eradicating poverty.

64. The family was a central element of his Government's social policy, as representing the basic unit of society and the natural environment for the healthy development and functioning of the individual and therefore society. Recent legislation had given legal recognition to the pivotal role played by women in society and particularly in the family. The Family Law provided that husband and wife were equal partners with equal rights in decisions in all matters affecting their family, particularly the care of their offspring. Furthermore, in line with its belief in equal opportunities for all, the Government of Malta had taken measures to ensure disabled persons could realize their potential.

65. Older people had a right to a dignified life, and to recognition for their past contribution to society. They were entitled to all the help they needed to overcome handicaps due to age, limitations or disease. While the State could provide the elderly with financial benefits, it was the family that should provide intangible benefits like love and companionship. Old age was not a

disease but a phase of life that required a lot of care, respect and love. In that respect, useful work was being done by the International Institute on Ageing (INIA) in Malta. The INIA served as a bridge between countries for the collection, exchange and dissemination of data, information and skills that concerned all aspects of ageing. It promoted technical cooperation in network-building and the establishment of focal points for training needs and training-related activities at the national level.

66. Government policy with regard to young people was to provide them with equal opportunities for education at all levels and to integrate them as a positive force for change and renewal into the mainstream of the political, social and economic life of the country, recognizing them as a vital element of the future of the nation.

67. Malta had chosen to achieve social justice amongst its people, particularly those in need. The Government had created an environment which encouraged voluntary and private initiative as important partners in the social field. Society had to ensure that, apart from providing personalized services to persons most in need, their potential opportunities and financial position were also improved.

68. Mr. CHANG SEE TEN (Malaysia) said that young people were both a major and potential human resource and were key agents for future social development. Their imagination, ideals, energies and vision were essential for the continuing development of their society. Without proper guidance they could easily fall prey to various social ills which would be costly to redress. Over 60 per cent of the young people in the world lived in Asia, and by the year 2025, that percentage was expected to reach 89 per cent. The socio-economic implications of that demographic change could not be lightly dismissed, since it could easily translate into diminished employment opportunities, lack of resources for social services and reduced education opportunities, all of which could lead to delinquency, crime and drug abuse. Youth in developing countries needed access to better education, training, technical assistance, technology, health and credit facilities. Addressing the needs of young people would ensure economic and social stability. Under the sixth Malaysian plan (1990-1995), various youth-development programmes had been implemented.

69. The designation of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons was timely and appropriate, since all countries were experiencing an increase in the absolute and relative size of their ageing population. By 2030, more than 1.4 billion people would be 60 years old or over, and most of those would live in Asia and the Pacific region. Given greater life expectancy and the breakdown of the extended family, steps should be taken to ensure that family ties were maintained and that caring for the elderly continued to be the responsibility of the family. In order to encourage children to take care of older persons, Malaysia had, since 1992, provided tax relief to children for the medical expenses of their elderly parents. Medical benefits for public-sector employees were extended to include their parents. Malaysia had formulated a National Policy for the Elderly in order to ensure that older persons were able to enjoy independence and quality of life. Planning for older persons in Malaysia would continue to take their needs into account.

70. More than 500 million people throughout the world had some type of physical, mental or sensory impairment, and about 80 per cent of those lived in the developing world. The International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 had helped to publicize the needs of that population and the need for policies aimed at integrating disabled persons into economic, political and social life. Malaysia was fully engaged at national and international levels in promoting the full participation and equality of people with disabilities in society. The Government would continue to care for them through the provision of education, training and rehabilitation programmes.

71. Malaysia recognized the family as the basic unit of society and the primary source of caring. It was time to go back to the basics of family life and values, and it was important to empower the family to face the challenges of the coming century. The concept of the traditional family must not be lost in rapid global changes. Malaysia therefore supported the improvement of economic and social conditions to enable family members to cope with change. It was important to promote healthy families, family planning, nutrition, child-development programmes, parenting skills and interaction between parents and children.

72. People were the core and the key to development. Investing in the well-being of people meant investing in the future well-being of all societies. It was time to empower the family, youth, the elderly and the disabled to face future challenges.

73. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that the common theme of the recent major United Nations conferences on social questions had been the search for a new concept of human-centred development. The human person should be the focus of all social, political and economic activity. The existing models of development had proved inadequate in that they had failed to overcome the problems of inequality and social exclusion. Poverty was a prime cause of social exclusion and had been a focus of attention at the World Summit for Social Development. States had committed themselves to establishing, by the end of 1996, national strategies for the eradication of extreme poverty and his delegation hoped that it would be possible to review the progress made thus far.

74. One of the first obligations of any nation must be to invest in its youth. Young people must be enabled to channel their idealism into the creation of a world where fundamental values were respected and human rights protected and where an atmosphere of solidarity prevailed. For many young people, however, the future held little promise. Some, especially girls, lacked educational opportunities. Others faced unemployment, even long-term unemployment. Drugs and crime daily destroyed the lives of thousands of young people, while the current climate of sexual permissiveness made it difficult to inculcate in the young a proper sense of responsibility with regard to their sexual behaviour. In such a context, there was a clear need, and indeed a desire on the part of many young people, to find a new moral vision.

75. Medical advances, particularly the eradication of many diseases, had led to a dramatic decline in mortality. As longevity had increased, however, respect and reverence for human life had diminished. It was difficult to believe that euthanasia was now perceived by some as an acceptable alternative to caring for

the sick and elderly and disabled persons. The Catholic Church called upon the international community to renew its recognition of the sacred dignity of all human life and to work to develop a new understanding of the contribution which the elderly could bring to society.

76. The family was the basic unit of society and played a crucial role in the world today. He urged all Governments and societies to recognize the special place of the family. The Catholic Church, for its part, would continue its efforts to strengthen and safeguard the sacredness of marriage and to promote the role of parents as the first educators of their children. The family of nations must recognize that the history of mankind, the history of salvation passed by way of the family and that the family stood at the centre of the struggle between good and evil, life and death and all that was opposed to love.

77. Mrs. BARGHOUTI (Observer for Palestine) said that the development of any society depended on the advancement of its young people, particularly in the fields of education, health and employment. The protection of the rights of young people should therefore be among the priorities of States and of the international community. The integration of girls and young women in national development policies was of special importance. Obstacles to gender equality must be removed in order to empower them to participate on an equal footing with their male counterparts in social, cultural, economic and political life. She welcomed the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and hoped that a concerted effort would be made, and the necessary resources provided, to enable the goals of that Programme to be achieved.

78. The young people of Palestine comprised over 70 per cent of its population. Most had known life only under Israeli occupation or in refugee camps. Nevertheless, they had played a major part in the struggle for Palestinian independence. Many had suffered physical and psychological trauma as a result, and all had paid a high price in terms of lost opportunities. Today, they continued to face harsh economic conditions, high unemployment and recurrent violence. Young Palestinians were still being detained in Israeli prisons.

79. Against that background, the Palestinian Authority was aware of its responsibility to strive, with the help of the international community, to create a better society in which young Palestinians could enjoy the fruits of freedom and prosperity. The establishment of a Ministry of Youth and Sport testified to its commitment to the advancement of Palestinian youth. Sadly, however, with the breakdown of the peace process, the optimism felt by so many had given way to despair. It was her hope that the peace process would be salvaged and put back on track for the benefit not only of Palestinian youth but of all the youth of the region.

80. Mr. FREEDMANN (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that the social situation today was characterized by unacceptably high levels of unemployment and underemployment. There had been a parallel rise in poverty and social exclusion, in particular in the developing world. Nevertheless, ILO remained committed to pursuing the goals which had emerged from the Copenhagen Summit and to promoting the integration of the world's youth, elderly and disabled persons into productive employment. ILO had recently developed an international information base and network, using the Internet, to enable

organizations engaged in research on the training and employment of persons with disabilities to share information. ILO was also cooperating with the Special Rapporteur on Disability to monitor implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

81. As world leaders searched for new and enhanced means to address the profound social problems facing the international community, the role of cooperatives, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report (A/51/267), was receiving renewed attention. While the global economy offered tremendous potential rewards, many were still left on the margins. Cooperatives were an effective means of integrating disadvantaged or socially excluded people in economic activity and society as a whole. Cooperatives also made a vital contribution to job creation and the promotion of sustainable growth. ILO had long been committed to supporting cooperatives. In particular, it valued their dynamic grass-roots role. By requiring that members committed their own resources as a share of enterprise capital, cooperatives ensured that local capital, often underused, was mobilized to support entrepreneurial development.

82. Like most institutions in society, cooperatives had not remained immune from change. Over the past decade, the liberalization of the economies of many developing countries had put an end to the special support and treatment which cooperatives had enjoyed, forcing them to compete on the open market with private enterprises. But, at the same time, democratization had lightened the political burden on cooperatives by allowing them to function as truly democratic organizations in the interests of their members, rather than as extended instruments of the State.

83. ILO was involved in several interregional programmes aimed at promoting the development of democratic and viable cooperatives in developing countries. COOPNET aimed to strengthen the managerial capacity of cooperatives by addressing their human resource development needs. A second, complementary programme, COOPREFORM was intended to encourage the development of cooperatives through legislative policy reforms. Finally, INDISCO worked with indigenous and tribal communities to help them become self-reliant, while respecting their traditional values, practices and culture. The programmes were already operational in a large number of countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa. ILO had a long history of identifying and implementing coherent, holistic approaches to promoting productive employment and social integration. Cooperatives remained a core element of that mandate.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.